

Lacuna Blue

By Mantrid Brizon

Chapter Twenty-Six: Suffer The Little Children

A week after James' return to Lagos Depot, George and May prepare their escape. With the credits drained from the account and the records "corrected", George locks the 200,000,000-credit chit in a wall safe.

"Are you ready, cupcake?" He asks.

"Are we really going to do this, little bear?" She turns to him.

"Hell-fucking-yes..." He says quite seriously.

"Then I'm more than ready." She coos, embracing her fiancé.

As the couple hold each other and share a passionate kiss, George's V.I. bracelet goes off. Sighing with frustration, he holds up his wrist and looks at the device. Reading the text message, he finds an encrypted link. May lets go of her mate as he walks toward his computer

terminal in their private quarters aboard the Bannockburn. Decrypting the link, George reads a strange and urgent request in his email. Michael, who was supposed to be on a mission to the moon of Titan, has requested the Bannockburn's presence on Mars.

Coordinates in the message leave an exact location on the planet's surface. Deep in the undeveloped jungles of Mars, Michael may have crashed, or even be hiding from the authorities. Having still not told the rest of the crew about their intentions to abandon the Slaver's Union, George and May make a pact; this will be the last mission they undertake for the Union. After finding out what Michael wants, they will reveal their desire to return to a legitimate way of life and leave it all behind.

Heading for the bridge, George summons his crew, who are all wandering about Lagos Depot. Only Ein still lives aboard the Bannockburn. For whatever reason, he's chosen to live aboard the ship indefinitely. Sitting in the bridge in wait, the crew slowly arrive. Rakshasa and Colette are the last to board the craft. With an empty cargo hold, the crew are at first confused as to the purpose of their mission, until George reveals Michael's message. Assuming it to be some form of cryptic S.O.S. they are quick to leave the space station.

After a short flight through space, the Bannockburn flies in low over the surface of Mars. The green canopy moves beneath the hull of the ship like ocean waves. Quickly reaching the coordinates that Michael had left them,

they find a massive field of barren soil. With the trees blasted away by the Governor Parr's plasma cannons, it's obvious that the Governor Parr is in no danger from the authorities. However, they might be stranded from some sort of mechanical or electrical malfunction.

"Uh... George?" Donovan begins.

"What?"

"They have cargo crates lying around." He explains.

Rising from his captain's chair, George races up to Donovan's terminal.

"He's right, sir. I'm registering a myriad of metallic crates." Colette adds.

"Metallic? ... But he's not carrying crates! He's wasn't carrying anything! Let's find out what the hell is going on here." George growls.

Touching down on the planet's surface, the Bannockburn's engines shut down. Sitting in an area more than adequate for the vessel, the crew make their way to the cargo hold. With their weapons drawn, Prat and Colette both dual wielding JV-8 'Shard' submachine guns, they ride the lift down to the surface. To their elation, only Michael, his male slave and two of his four crew are on the surface. They appear to be examining the crates, checking the status of their cargo.

“Okay... What the **FUCK** are you doing with these crates, on Mars?!” George snarls.

“I took it upon myself to advance our business strategy.” Michael coolly answers.

“Our? You’re a captain, and I’m the *admiral*. One of us is in charge, and it sure as hell isn’t you. Captain Irving sent you to Titan to pick up sky dust and bring it back, so why are you here and where did these crates come from?!”

Stepping around a stack of crates nearly shoulder height, Michael motions to his men. With a wave of his hand, they approach a series of crates resting on the ground, ready for opening.

“I was going to go to Titan when I encountered a liner. Believe it or not, it was a working MBX-2160. **Huuuge** ship! I decided to make up my own mission...” Michael begins.

“... What?!” George blinks in disbelief.

“It’s for the good of the Union. Trust me.” Michael holds out a hand, as if to somehow calm his leader’s growing rage. “So, I sent a distress signal, they allowed me to dock, and as soon as the Governor Parr touched down, I started shooting. After wiping out a lot of the men in the hangar, my team and I swept the ship. We harvested all of the valuable cargo.”

“Harvested?” May murmurs.

“What else would you call it?”

“So, these crates are filled with young women?” Kira asks.

“... Some of them. I think we can really expand our customer base with this!” Michael chirps.

Motioning to his guards, they open the crate nearest the group. Steam wafts from the lid as it lifts and slides away. As the lights flicker on, George’s heart sinks. May and Kira both find themselves feeling sick and even Rakshasa turns away, the first sign of emotion they’ve seen in her since she was hired. Inside of the crate is a female Voeldahn child. Several years from puberty, the tiny being lay in stasis like any other adult woman. George’s hand tremors and he glares at Michael.

“Think of what someone might pay for that!”

“You sick son of a bitch!” George screams.

Rushing up and grabbing Michael by the shirt collar, he slams his back against a stack of metal crates. Prat stumbles backward at the sight and drops his blasters on the ground. Kira turns and vomits at the thought of what Michael is suggesting. How could he stoop this low?! Rakshasa and May comfort Kira, who softly cries. Ein and Donovan look to each other in disbelief, while Garin and Colette seem otherwise unphased by the revelation.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?! Why would you do this?!” George screams, his voice shivering as he struggles to hold back tears of rage.

“Relax!” Michael pleads, resting his hands on George’s wrists.

“Relax? RELAX?! Do you have any idea what you’ve done here?! Well I’m going to see that you don’t get away with this, you fucking bastard!”

“Why the hell are you so angry? There are freaks out there who would kill for that cargo!” Michael retorts.

“They’re not cargo! They’re children, and you orphaned them!”

In a fit of rage, George spins around and shoves Michael. Stumbling, he trips over a crate and nearly breaks his ankle. Drawing his blaster, George storms up to him. Michael’s men aim their weapons at George, but his crew are quick to step in. Donovan, Prat, Rakshasa and Colette disarm Michael’s guards. Aiming his blaster at Michael’s head, George’s hand tremors. Tears stream down his face as he cries in front of everyone.

“God damn you for this. God damn you...” He sniffles. “You’re done.”

“What do you mean?” Michael nervously asks.

“I’m taking these children off your hands and we’re letting them go. There’s no way in hell I’m letting you hurt innocent kids like this. I’m programming your ship to autopilot back to Lagos Depot, and when we’re all back home... I’m going to deal with you.” George explains.

Standing beside her fiancé, May takes him in her arms; it comforts her as much as it does him. As a sign of solidarity, she aims her own blaster at Michael, whom she'd like to kill herself. However, it dawns on her that they have a problem.

"Little bear, we don't have a brig." May whispers to her lover.

"That's alright. The Governor Parr does. We just need a volunteer or two to make sure he stays locked up." George says loudly.

Realizing that this may be his only opportunity to save his master, Garin jumps at the chance. Not realizing the nature of their relationship, George allows Garin to run the Governor Parr, while Michael, his slave man and his crew will be locked in the gunboat's tiny brig. To make sure that George's orders are carried out, Colette volunteers as well. As neither are truly necessary for short-term piloting of the Bannockburn, they were the best choices to begin with.

"You're making a mistake." Michael grumbles as George locks his wrists in handcuffs.

"The only mistake I made was not killing you when James first suggested it. I intend to correct that mistake, once we're back on Lagos." George growls into his ear.

Using their power loaders, George and his crew set all of the crates down on the ground, readying them for

opening. Instead of releasing the children right away, George prepares an encrypted message, using a Lane Jacker program that will serve as a proxy. Once they launch, before they have even left Mars' atmosphere, he'll send the location and contents of the crates to the Mars Police. Hopefully, many of the children have immediately family who can care for them.

With the crates and message ready, Michael, his slave and crew imprisoned in the brig of the Governor Parr, and the gunboat's programming set, the Slaver's take their leave. No sooner does George sit upon his captain's chair does he break down into tears. The crew, many of them having known him for years, can't blame him for his emotional display. Rakshasa, one of the only newer members, finds a mild muscle relaxant among her field medical kit.

"Here... This will take the edge off, sir." She says softly, kneeling beside his chair.

While May comforts the crying George, Rakshasa attempts to administer the drug. He quickly stops her, taking hold of her wrist.

"Wait." He snuffles, wiping his bloodshot eyes with the back of his hand. "I need to say something."

Everyone turns to look at him. Glancing to May, she nods her head in approval; she's certain she knows what it is he wishes to share.

"This is done. We... May and I... We don't want this life anymore. I claimed our fair share of credits. 200,000,000... If any of you want to join us, we'll pay you the fair share and you can do whatever the hell you want."

Everyone is deathly silent. As they glance at each other and then back to George, it's clear that many of them had simply been waiting for George to leave before following him out the door.

"Yeah! I'll go!" Kira suddenly chirps.

"Me too." Ein nods.

Rakshasa, Donovan, Prat, and their ex-slave girlfriends are all more than happy to abandon the Slaver's Union; the horrible monster that it's become is simply too much for them to bear.

"I want to be there when you tear that sick fuck's head off!" Prat smirks, cracking his knuckles.

"I have ways to keep him alive for some time while you end it." Rakshasa coldly adds.

"No. One quick shot to the head and then we get the fuck out of there." George replies.

“Suit yourself.” Rakshasa shrugs her shoulders.

“I’m proud of you, little bear.” May coos, holding him tightly and giving him a kiss.

“Thanks, cupcake.”

As Rakshasa gives George the shot to calm his nerves, Ein takes off. May plots their course while Kira sends the message to the police, as they had planned. Within an hour, all of the children will be awake and cared for by the police, and by day’s end, they can watch the story unfolding on the news networks. Having already launched, the Governor Parr flies through the void of space. Sitting in the deathly silent bridge, Colette looks over a terminal, her submachine guns hanging by her hips.

“So, what do you think should happen to Michael?” Garin nervously asks, breaking the silence.

“I serve Mr. Woods. If he says Mr. Cost has to die, then he has to die.” She calmly answers.

“You’d bend over a table and let him fuck you if he asked, wouldn’t you?” Garin asks with a hint of disgust.

“Not if he asks, but I would if it was an order.” Colette dryly answers.

“That’s what I thought...” Garin murmurs.

Sensing that something isn’t right, Colette grabs the pistol grip of her right JV-8, turning in time to see Garin holding a blaster and pointing it at her head. Diving out of the way as he fires, the molten shard of electromagnetically

shaved metal cuts her cheek. She returns fire, but as she falls to the ground, her accuracy is less than adequate. Garin catches two rounds to his left arm and leg, both flesh wounds as he opens fire. Shooting as fast as he can, he murders Colette before she can rise from the ground or crawl behind cover.

For good measure, and out of pure racial hatred, he reloads and empties his weapon into her body a second time. After taking a moment to bandage his wounds, he takes a keycard that Colette had been entrusted with and limps to the brig. Opening the small cell, he releases the six men inside.

“Well! ... Took you long enough!” Michael smirks.

“Sorry. I had to deal with his guard dog first.”

“I’m amazed you survived.” Michael shakes his head.

“I wouldn’t have if she had seen it coming.”

“Lucky for me that she didn’t. Are we heading to Lagos Depot still?” Michael asks, walking past Garin and toward the bridge.

“Yes, sir! Did you want me to change course?”

“Absolutely not!” Michael stops in his tracks, turning to Garin. “I want you to pretend that you’re being a good boy and following orders. When we dock, lead us to my lab in chains. If we do this right, we can enact the final phase of my plan...”

“Of course, sir!” Garin nods.

“The Slaver’s Union is mine...” Michael growls.